Michael Campbell

Prof. Elizabeth Renker

English 4590.08H

26 April 2013

Children in Company with Adults: Double Coding in Sarah Piatt's Postbellum Children's Poetry

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the marketplaces for children's literature and literature for adults had an ambiguous relationship. Unlike today, where books are stratified according to readers' age groups, "the line between juvenile and adult literature was all but invisible" (Commager 10). According to Beverly Lyon Clark's study of nineteenth-century children's literature, adults were just as, or more, likely to read works written for children, as they were those for adults (48). Consequently, nineteenth-century writers found themselves writing for both audiences simultaneously. Postbellum poet Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt tailored her poetry to fit these marketplace conditions. Piatt was, to an extent, a children's poet, given that she published extensively in children's magazines and collections. However, she was simultaneously using children's poetry as a platform to write critical poetry for an adult audience. I argue that, by double coding her poems in children's periodicals and volumes, Piatt sends two different messages to adults and children simultaneously, an experimental poetics that subverted postbellum children's books' focus on pedagogy.

For the purposes of this project, I rely on the postmodern idea of double coding. Charles Jencks, a prominent scholar of postmodern architecture, coined the term "double coding" in 1977[1]. His book, *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post-Modern*

[1] *The New Paradigm in Architecture*, where Jencks explains double coding, was first published in 1977 as *The New Language of Post-Modern Architecture*. Although, my copy of *New Paradigm* was published in 2002, I use 1977 to date the term "double coding" due to the books'

*Architecture*, writes about how buildings communicate in discrete codes. They take on different meanings based on viewers' individual cultural backgrounds and levels of architectural knowledge (27). Therefore a successfully double coded building would be able to transmit two discrete messages to two different viewers simultaneously (Jencks 11, 30, 51). Brian Nicol puts double coding into a literary context in *The Cambridge Guide to Postmodern Fiction*. Citing Jencks, Nicol generalizes the definition of double coding as the "practice of doing two things at the same time…[which] is what makes it essentially an ironic technique" (15). Piatt was obviously not a writer during the postmodern era; however, the application of postmodern code theory illuminates how her poetry works. Piatt's poetry on children operates by similar principles, communicating different things to adults and children simultaneously. Adults must understand poetry enough to catch her deviations from genre norms. They must be clever (and/or cynical) enough to catch her sarcasm and irony. Conversely, these deviations must be veiled enough to remain imperceptible to children and engage young readers with a different message entirely. Piatt's poetry on children fits these requirements, giving us license to read them as doubly coded.

In order to apply double code theory to Piatt's poetry, we need to visualize a situation in which two different audiences are experiencing her poetry. My experimental scenario consists of an adult reading "Two Visions of Fairly-Land," published in an 1881 installment of *St. Nicholas*, aloud to a child[2]. The short poem features two characters, one male and one female. They wake up in the morning, meet each other on the stairs in their house, and talk about the previous

---

having been written by the same person and to the fact that a first edition copy is incredibly difficult to find.

[2] Scenarios like this one occurred often during the postbellum period. According to Angela Sorby in *Schoolroom Poets*, public readings both at home and in the classroom were the primary ways that children experienced poetry (xxiii).

night's dreams. The female tells the male that she has dreamt of Prince Charming, and the male retorts with a long account of visit to "Fairy-Land[3]." A third-person narrator opens the poem, which converts to dialogue between the two characters in this couplet: "She met him on the stair with half a blush: / 'How late you sleep!' he said. She whispered, 'Hush!'" (lines 3-4). The child listener is likely to receive the poem at face value. The included couplet demonstrates how the rhyme scheme, meter, and diction are all tailored to the child reader. The child-like language and singsong feel (facilitated by the iambic rhythm) make the poem easy for children to understand. The adult reader's experience of "Two Visions" may be far more complicated. The characters' ages are, after all, conspicuously unspecified. Therefore, the two characters may be adults. Perhaps, given this ambiguity, it is a portrait of a woman trapped in an unhappy marriage. In this reading, the poem's final stanza, shows a man asserting his dominance over his wife, sparked by his jealousy of Prince Charming: "'How does one get [to Fairy-land]?' 'Oh, the path lies through / The dawn, you little sleeper, and the dew'" (lines 15-16). Because only adults would have been likely to pick up on this alternative reading of "Two Visions," I label it doubly coded. Reading "Two Visions" as doubly coded gives insight into the two discrete ways the poem is understood; it is charming to the child, harrowing to the adult.

Postbellum literary critics acknowledged Piatt's attempts to reach two different audiences, although some doubted her ability to appeal to both sides of the child-adult readership. E.C. Stedman, a famous postbellum literary critic, talks about her writing for the mixed market in his review of Piatt's 1877 *Poems in Company with Children* taken from an 1878 issue of *Harper's Monthly Magazine*. "They are not poems for children, though the quaintness of some of them will attract to them some juvenile readers, who will enjoy without comprehending

[3] See appendix for "Two Visions of Fairy-Land" reprinted in full.

them…they will touch the hearts of those in which the children's room is the biggest and most sacred of the soul (628)." Stedman differentiates between two levels of understanding of the same text, an idea that coincides with double code theory. However, Stedman does not necessarily feel that Piatt's double coding improves her poetry for readers on either level. He writes, "some of [the poems] are so subtle as to be not only incomprehensible to the reader, but to awaken suspicion that the author did not comprehend what she meant herself" (628). To Stedman, Piatt was doing herself a disservice by unnecessarily complicating her poetry on children. The fact that Stedman talks about a dual readership shows that Piatt was evaluated in the context of a blurred marketplace, despite his negative response. Perhaps Stedman simply did not think that Piatt's double-code approach was the best way to write for either body of readers in the mixed market.

For others, Piatt's poetry had value for adults even if it held no interest for children. An unnamed critic writes a positive review of Piatt's child poems in an 1886 publication of *Irish Monthly Magazine*. His or her review encompasses multiple books, including *Poems in Company with Children*[4]. The reviewer writes, "Its insight into child-life, the *naiveté* of a child's thoughts, here so accurately rendered, will make the book especially loveable to grown lovers of children, though here, perhaps, it stops short: it will hardly reach the children themselves… (387)" Like Stedman, this reviewer feels that Piatt writes more for an adult audience, with limited appeal to children. However, unlike Stedman, this reviewer feels that Piatt's poetry will appeal strongly to adults. Further in the review, he or she writes that "[Piatt's poetry] will make the grown reader sigh and wonder at the vivid reflection of his own childhood" (387-8). It will appeal to adults,

[4] A footnote in this review says that it covers *The Children Out-of-Doors*, which is the title of the second half of *Poems*.

despite its childish style. If, as the review implies, Piatt's child poetry could have been marketed to adults, Piatt's double coding could have been one of her greatest strengths.

Still others felt that Piatt was successful at reaching adults and children simultaneously, but only if adult readers were observant enough to catch the messages beneath the child-pleasing surface. W.D. Howells, an extremely influential postbellum writer, poet, and critic, was optimistic about Piatt's ability to write for a mixed readership. He talks about her "innate poetic genius of the subtlest kind" in an 1874 review of her poetry in *Atlantic Monthly Magazine* (104). He calls attention to her treatment of children in the first paragraph: "[Piatt] is a mother, talking with a mystical, half-melancholy playfulness to her children, and telling them tales in which there always lurks a poignant allegory for older hearts" (104). The language of this review coincides with my application of double code theory; the "poignant allegories" are hidden messages for adults. Howells's language invokes double coding further in the review, saying that "there never was poetry that more keenly searched out the hiding-places of our mute, dim fears and longings, than these mournful strains which give them voice here; and especially to whoever has known what it is tremblingly and fearfully to love children, here are appeals that cannot fail of quick response" (104). Howells then reprints "The Favorite Child" and "Baby or Bird," two poems stylized for children below[5]. Howells feels that these poems had the ability to speak to a deep level of adult understanding. However, this understanding is limited to a certain group of adults, namely those who have had experiences with children. Jencks's theory of different understandings via double code resonates strongly with the language this review. Howells's

[5] I call these poems "stylized for children" based on their similarities to other postbellum poems marked explicitly for children. Books such as *Sterling's Little Southern Orator* (1872), *Kavanaugh's Juvenile Speaker* (1877), and *The Kindergarten* (1891), all of which are explored later in this essay, consist of poems written with easy-to-read diction and singsong meter/rhyme scheme. Piatt's poems listed in this review display these markers, and would be easy for a child to comprehend on the surface.

belief in the effectiveness of Piatt's poetry based on readers' different experiences fuels my application of double code theory to Piatt's writing.

Paula Bernat Bennett discusses Piatt's "impressive periodical record" and her position as a political poetess, bringing Piatt into the fold of subversive women periodical writers (*Palace* xxviii). She argues that nineteenth century women poets had the most purchase in periodicals; I analyze Piatt's poetry and, subsequently, double coding in this context. Bennett characterizes postbellum woman periodical poets as subversive writers due to the fact that they wrote political criticism into genteel poetry. The introduction to *Poets in the Pubic Sphere* makes this case with the poem, "To My Child," written anonymously in 1850. Bennett highlights the poem's political messages hidden beneath its plain surface. The poem is an example of the genteel style, which, according to Michael Webster, "tended to consist of short, inoffensive, traditional verse about inward feelings, written in a deliberately purified, rather vague, 'poetic' language" ("Poetic Modes"). Bennett talks about the implications that come from such a gesture by woman poets:

> "To My Child" challenges key scholarly assumptions about nineteenth-century U.S. women and the poetry they wrote. Most especially, in publicizing one woman's (possible) transgressive behavior and (certain) tortured grief, "To My Child" suggests that the production of lyric poetry by nineteenth-century U.S. women may have had more *political* significance than feminist literary and political historians have granted it to date. (*Poets* 3)

Piatt fits into this context, writing periodical poetry alongside the period's other woman poets. I would note that Bennett is a strong authority on Piatt. She is largely responsible for exhuming Piatt's poetry from archival collections, collecting and publishing her most important poems in 2001's *Palace Burner: The Selected Poetry of Sarah Piatt.*

Piatt's political messages become apparent when we break down and read her poetry as doubly coded. "The Funeral of a Doll," first published in an 1872 edition of *The Capital,* is a perfect working example of how Bennett and Jencks's theories come together in Piatt's poetry. "Funeral" consists of two parts: the first three stanzas describe the play-funeral held by a group of children for a doll named "Little Nell." It then switches to a young girl's report of the funeral to her mother in the fourth and final stanza. If we break the poem down just as we did with "Two Visions," we see the two messages working on two different levels of understanding. Children simply receive a story about a sad girl, grieving over the loss of a beloved doll. Certain style markers give "Funeral" child-like characteristics, as seen in the first stanza:

> They used to call her Little Nell,
> In memory of that lovely child
> Whose story each had learned to tell.
> She too was slight and still and mild,
> Blue-eyed and sweet, she always smiled,
> And never troubled anyone
> Until her pretty life was done (1-7).

The poem looks, feels, and sounds like a nursery rhyme, marked by its singsong meter and diminutive diction. Beneath the neat surface of "Funeral," however, Piatt subtly inserts criticism of Christianity. She invokes this criticism by using parentheses in lines 20-21: "The Preacher slowly murmured on / (With many warnings to the bad) / The virtues of the Doll now gone." The punctuation suggests a subtle change in tone in this line, turning it from a simple description of the "Preacher" to a snide, sarcastic jab at religion's role in normalizing children to grief and

sadness[6]. The incendiary criticism seems out of place in a poem written for children, but not, according to Bennett, out of place for a woman writer of periodical poetry.

Children's periodicals, in which Piatt was publishing extensively, were one of the most forceful arenas for her to use double coding for political ends. Angela Sorby offers a theory of children's literary periodicals that characterizes them as arenas prime for experimental writing. She argues that postbellum children's periodicals were actively pushing the boundaries of children's literature, experimenting with repurposing traditional children's themes and structures. Sorby develops her theory by focusing on poetry written in the children's magazine, *St. Nicholas*, claiming that "if the *St. Nicholas* poets relied on established traditions, [publishing poets] used them only to reinvent them" (60). Sorby later asserts, "In *St. Nicholas*, although the prose is full of covert lessons, [the editor] also allows for a certain conspiratorial 'naughtiness,' especially in the verse selections" using examples of poetic experimentation with children's tropes such as Mother Goose and Mary's Little Lamb (66). While Piatt's poetry is more political than "naughty," Sorby's theory explains how Piatt's habit of inserting criticism into children's poetry would have been effective (or permitted, at least) in a realm characterized by experimentation and subversion.

Reading Piatt as doubly coded shows how she wrote with the trends of experimentation with traditional children's themes and forms in children's periodicals. "Two Visions" is a perfect example of Piatt experimenting with children's literature, taking a familiar childhood trope ("Fairy-land") and using it to write a story containing adult subject matter. The subject matter is also political, recalling Bennett's characterization. I also note that "Two Visions" was published

[6] Children in the nineteenth century were often normalized and instructed through play, a concept explored at length in Gillian Brown's *Child's Play*, a chapter in Levander and Singley's *The American Child*. Brown's theory appears later in this essay.

first in *St. Nicholas*, fitting Piatt nicely into Sorby's theory of the children's magazine. "Two Visions" shows where Sorby and Bennett overlap; in it, Piatt repurposes familiar children's poetry for political ends.

Piatt's use of double code as a means to repurpose familiar forms of poetry appeared in places outside of children-specific periodicals, including fashion magazines, general-interest magazines, and collected books. "The Little Boy I Dreamed About," for instance, first appeared in an 1876 edition of *Harper's Bazar*. At this time, the magazine was "a repository of fashion, pleasure, and instruction" ("The First"). In this venue, mostly adults would likely have been the readers of "Little Boy". The poem repurposes the child elegy, a popular genre of poetry during Piatt's time (Cavitch 144). In "Little Boy," a mother grieves over the loss of her favorite child, berating her remaining children for falling short of the behavior expectations set forth by their late brother. This is easy to see and understand, given the simple, childish diction and singsong meter and rhyme scheme:

> *He* does not hide, and cut his hair,
> And wind the watches wrong, and try
> To throw the kitten down the stair
> To see how often it can die.
> (It's strange that one can wonder why). (lines 16-20)

Punctuation again invokes double coding; the parentheses imply that the speaker *thinks* the last line instead of speaking it, turning it into an intimate internal reflection. Additionally, the italics change the tone of the word "he" from informative to resentful, suggesting that the speaker resents her living children. Clearly, something far more complex is happening in the speaker's

mind, much deeper than simply admonishing her living children's unsavory behavior. The end of the poem shows the real purpose of the poem:

> Dead? Dead? Somehow I do not know.
>
> The sweetest children die. We may
>
> Miss some poor foot-print in the snow
>
> That was his very own to-day –
>
> "God's will" is what the Christians say. (lines 46-50)

This stanza reveals the speaker's criticism of Christianity's response to her child's death. The line in quotation marks is a flippant response to the callous, insufficient consolation that the Church has provided. As in "Two Visions" and "Funeral," reading "Little Boy" as double coded exposes its political objectives. Furthermore, its publication in a venue outside of children's periodicals changes the way we read in Piatt's poetry. Since her subversive children's poetry was not tied to children's periodicals, we have license to read Piatt as an experimental, subversive writer in any given context.

Because Piatt's books politically charged contained poems that can be read as doubly coded, they deserve attention in analyzing Piatt and double coding in other contexts. At this point, I will move into a study of her books as objects in the same realm as other postbellum books. I focus on 1877's *Poems in Company with Children,* which contains marvelous examples of Piatt's political children's poetry. In fact, "Funeral" and "Little Boy" both appear in *Poems,* and their elements of double coding are preserved by virtue of the fact that they were reprinted verbatim[7]. Reprinting was common during Piatt's time, as explained by Jennifer Putzi. Putzi explores the effects of poetic reprinting by tracking the case of "Rock Me to Sleep," a poem that,

[7] See appendix, illustrations 1a-2b, for "The Funeral of a Doll" and "The Little Boy I Dreamed About" in full, as they appear in *Poems in Company With Children.*

in 1865, was so widely circulated that a number of people were able to claim authorship. “Along the way, ‘Rock Me to Sleep’ was…copied into commonplace books…Far from a mistake, this kind of circulation was, in fact, what most poets of the period hoped for when they published their work in newspapers” (770). With “Rock Me to Sleep” as a model, reproduction of Piatt’s periodical poems in books was consistent with market practices. Thus, I am simultaneously fascinated and unsurprised by the fact that Piatt’s incendiary, oftentimes morose poetry was allowed to be included in books associated with children. Her poems were not out of place in books, even though, as we will see, her political tendencies fit less comfortably.

*Poems in Company with Children* associates itself with children’s literature in its title; therefore, we can study how it relates to other postbellum books written for children. The poems in the book are all focused on children in some way. Most of the book’s notable poems, like “Funeral” and “Little Boy,” were written for publication in periodicals before the book was conceived, being two of them. *Poems*’s table of contents sections it into two halves: “The Children In-Doors” and “The Children-Out-Of-Doors,” in that order. The title of the second half should sound familiar, as it was the subject of a previously cited *Irish Monthly* review. That review expressed confusion as to how Piatt’s poetry fit into the literary marketplace, as did the aforementioned Stedman review from *Harper’s Monthly*. This confusion could have stemmed from the title itself: *Poems in Company with Children*. Notice that “with” is used instead of “for,” impeding the impulse to classify the book as “for” children. This resistance is reflective of how *Poems* related to the genre of children’s literature as a whole. Other children’s books written during the postbellum period use the preposition “for” in their titles. For example, we have 1877’s *Kavanaugh’s Juvenile Speaker for Very Little Boys and Girls*. Mrs. Kavanaugh, the given author, makes it clear that children are the intended recipients and practitioners of her book’s

rhetorical exercises. 1885's *Tommy's First Speaker for Little Boys and Girls* does the same thing, showing, by its publication date, that this title format was consistent and effective in helping books self-classify. Self-consciousness was another marked feature of the children's book, exemplified by the titles listed above and others, such as 1891's *The Kindergarten, or Home and School Culture*. The book's implies that its writers and users are aware of its role as a domestic, child-centered piece of literature. *Poems*'s lack of self-consciousness title is perhaps what threw readers. "With" conflates the child and adult readers of the book, confusing to readers used to being told this information specifically in the title.

Piatt's inclusion of politically political works like "Funeral" and "Little Boy" in *Poems* conflates the different functions of children's book literature and children's magazine literature. While the latter is widely studied as an arena for adult writers to be experimental, children's books served more as pedagogical tools. The authors themselves substantiate this claim; their prefaces—basically self-advertisements—tout how useful they will be as teaching aids. The preface to *Kavanaugh's Juvenile Speaker* reads:

> Teachers and others, who devise and superintend these exhibitions, experience a glow of satisfaction at the success of their little orators that amply repays them for the trouble they have taken…The author of this book has had a great deal of experience in arranging juvenile exhibitions, and hopes that the recitations and dialogues contained in it will furnish material aid to those who have a similar object in view. (Kavanaugh)

Kavanaugh appeals directly to the adult consumer—in this case, a teacher—with her book's teaching potential. Other authors appeal to adults by casting their books as pedagogical necessities. *The Kindergarten* addresses adults directly in its introduction—the section is even titled "Mothers and Teachers." In it the book's compiler begs adults to invest in their children's

education. She makes the case that children's pedagogical success can only be ensured if adults encourage learning from a young age. The compiler asks mothers and teachers directly, "Shall we not begin at once a thorough study of child-nature? Shall we not work systematically until the little characters are able to rise upward as time flies onward" (viii)? Such a study would, of course, begin with buying *The Kindergarten* and making use of its carefully designed pedagogical materials. Piatt makes no claims like these in *Poems*—the title page simply gives way to the table of contents, which moves straight into the poetry. It does contain some promotional material, but this is relegated to the back cover and consists only of fragments of reviews by others. The reviews noticeably lack pedagogical appeals to adults. "She has a special gift of seeing into a child's heart, and all of her [poems]…are full of the heaven which lies about us in our infancy," writes E.C. Stedman (163). The others follow suit, casting *Poems* as an item for adult enjoyment rather than pedagogical use.

The poems themselves are the heart of what really separates Piatt from other postbellum children's book writers. They are, after all, the exact same poems, doubly coded for adults and children with the criticism implanted in the adults-only message. This is a point of contention between Bennett and myself. In *Palace-Burner*, Bennett writes that, "Piatt's books were slippery guides to the kind of writer she actually was" (xxxii). I disagree, beginning with the fact that I used *Poems in Company with Children* as a guide to discovering how political criticism and subversion works in Piatt's poetry. My contention also makes sense in a more objective light: the fact that Piatt's poems were copied, in full, over to the book does not change their content, nor does it give an incorrect impression about Piatt's writing. It does lead to the conclusion that Piatt's book poetry works against books like *Kavanaugh's* and *The Kindergarten*. These books

demonstrate how Piatt's book poetry retains its embedded criticism on the bookshelf. Piatt was still a subversive, political, and experimental writer, only now in a sphere focused on pedagogy.

The division between Piatt and other children's poetry is most visible with direct comparison; luckily, there are analogous poems on both sides. Take, for example, "Mamma is in Heaven," a grim little poem included in *Sterling's Little Southern Orator: A New Collection of Original and Selected Pieces, in Poetry, Prose, and Dialogue, for Juvenile Speakers*, published in 1872. The poem is an elegy, in which an older child consoles her younger siblings about the death of their mother. The poem is analogous to Piatt's elegy, "The Little Boy I Dreamed About." However, where "Little Boy" is critical, "Mamma" is purely pedagogical, adhering to the goals of Sterling's collection (Sterling's preface, like our other examples, emphasizes pedagogy). The third stanza shows the poem's intent outright, where the eldest girl begins to talk about her mother:

> Come near me, sister and brother.
> And I'll tell you of our mother
> Who said, we must love each other,
> When she left home, for another
> In heaven. (lines 11-15)

As the girl instructs her siblings, the poem instructs juvenile readers as to how to properly respond to death. The children must remain steadfast, obedient, and supportive of one another. If they do, they will be rewarded by eternal life in paradise. The poem makes this clear by tagging "in heaven" onto the end of each stanza, a vocal reminder to children listening to this poem spoken aloud (which probably happened often, given that this poem is in a book of orations). The language lacks the biting tone of Piatt's "Little Boy." Clever manipulations of punctuation and

questions of ambiguity are entirely absent. As such, the poem cannot truly be read as doubly coded. Nothing exists beneath the innocuous lessons of "Mamma;" the poem merely explains how good Christian faith soothes the loss of a family member, and nothing more. "Little Boy" is, therefore, a total inversion of "Mamma," showing how Christianity has left a grieving mother with more questions than answers.

Piatt's poetry works against entire tropes and recurring motifs of children's book literature, while preserving the figures themselves. "The Funeral of a Doll," for instance, utilizes the figure of the Doll to criticize the Church. The Doll is a recurring figure in pedagogical children's books, not surprising given the link between pedagogy and playtime. In the article, "Child's Play," Gillian Brown characterizes this link: "The dynamics between children and objects in nineteenth-century American fiction suggest that children's engagements are a natural fact of their existence…useful to parents and educators" (20). Dolls, then, would have been the perfect tools for an adult to teach a young girl how to behave. Poems such as "Dressing Mary Ann," included in *The Kindergarten*, demonstrate how adult writers of pedagogical material taught lessons with toys[8]. The poem follows a young girl as she makes clothes for, dresses, and goes out on the town with her doll, Mary Ann. The poem reads like a manual of instructions; the author has numbered the stanzas and provided each with an illustration of how the girl dresses Mary Ann. A little girl would be able to follow the poem and its instructions. The rewards of adhering to societal norms entice the young reader to mimic the behavior of Mary Ann's young caretaker. The mimicry would not have been hard, either; we can assume that little girls had access to dolls, and were probably encouraged by adults to play with them if they held such educational value. Doll poetry appears numerous times in *The Kindergarten*, each of which is as

[8] See appendix, illustrations 3a-3d, for "Dressing Mary Ann" in full. Note the illustrations and numerical structure.

markedly pedagogical as "Dressing Mary Ann"[9]. Piatt's answer to the Doll as a device for normalizing children (specifically young girls) is, of course "The Funeral of a Doll." She uses the Doll as the anchor for her criticism of the Church. Christianity's negative qualities are rendered through the children's interaction with the doll. The doll stands in for the Church's pedagogical agency, which Piatt criticizes specifically with her Doll. Thus, "Funeral" is an instance where the Doll, still a figure of pedagogy, criticizes instead of instructs, markedly different from its role in other children's books.

The same-yet-different relationship between the Dolls in both poems characterizes the relationship between Piatt and other postbellum writers. Piatt displayed mastery of the genteel style of poetry, which is known today mainly for its innocuous plainness and reluctance to venture outside of established poetic traditions. On the surface, Piatt's poetry begrudgingly fits this pejorative label. However, in Bennett's opinion and my own, Piatt was vastly different from other genteel poets. Bennett wrote *Palace Burner* specifically to "put Piatt's reputation as a genteel poet (and nothing more) permanently to rest" (xxxiii). She cites Piatt's political tendencies and her willingness to write against genteel tastes in her argument against the genteel classification. I would argue that her child poetry is where she truly becomes anti-genteel. Piatt's double coding also speaks to her position in the world of postbellum children's literature. In essence, she wrote children's literature for adults with subversive intentions. Magazines provided an appropriate outlet for this sort of writing, being arenas that promoted literary experimentation. Remarkably, Piatt's child poetry remained critical in book form; her children's book poetry, like Piatt herself, was a misfit in its own realm, with objectives entirely different and far more

[9] Titles include *The Doll-Baby Show* (76), *The Little Dressmaker* (87), *Doll House Troubles* (88), and *Dolly's Toothache* (94). All of these are instructional, and most are accompanied by demonstrative illustrations.

complicated than its kin. Such extreme deviation from genteel conventions should be taken as reasons for absolving Piatt of the genteel identity and moving her into the canon of American poets. Her child poetry is only one example; however, I believe that it is the most explicit and the most effective.

# Works Cited

Bennett, Paula Bernat. *Palace-Burner: The Selected Poetry of Sarah Piatt*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001. Print.

Bennett, Paula Bernat. *Poets in the Public Sphere: The Emancipatory Project of American Women's Poetry, 1800-1900*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003. Print.

Brown, Gillian. "Child's Play." 2000. *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2003. 13-39. Print.

Cavitch, Max. *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2007. Print.

Clark, Beverly Lyon. *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003. Print.

Commager, Henry Steele. “When Majors Wrote for Minors.” *The Saturday Review* (10 May 1952): 10-12. *UNZ*. Web. 21 April 2013.

"The First 30 Years: 1867-97." *Harper's BAZAAR*. Hearst Communications, Inc., 2013. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

Howells, W.D. Rev. of *A Voyage to the Fortunate Isles* by Sarah M.B. Piatt. *Atlantic Monthly Magazine*. July 1874: 104-105. Print. The Sarah M.B. Piatt Collection of The Rare Books and Manuscripts Library of The Ohio State University Libraries, Columbus, OH.

Jencks, Charles. *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2002. Print.

Kavanaugh, Mrs. Russel. *Kavanaugh's Juvenile Speaker for Very Little Boys and Girls*. New York: Dick and Fitzgerald Publishers, 1877. The Jerry Tarver Rhetoric, Elocution, and Oratory Collection, The Rare Books and Manuscripts Library of The Ohio State University Libraries, Columbus, OH.

Miller, Lida Brooks. *The Kindergarten, or Home and School Culture.* Minneapolis: L.M. Ayer Publishing Co., 1891. The Jerry Tarver Elocution, Rhetoric, and Oratory Collection, The Rare Books and Manuscripts Library of The Ohio State University Libraries, Columbus, OH.

"Mrs. Piatt's Poems." Rev. of *A Voyage to the Fortunate Isles, An Irish Garland, In Primrose Time,* and *The Children Out-of-Doors* by Sarah M.B. Piatt. *Irish Monthly Magazine.* June 1886: 285-390. Print. The Sarah M.B. Piatt Collection of The Rare Books and Manuscripts Library of The Ohio State University Libraries, Columbus, OH.

Nicol, Bran. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. Print.

Piatt, Sarah Morgan Bryan *Poems in Company with Children*. Boston: D. Lothrop and Company, 1877. The Sarah M. B. Piatt Collection The Rare Books and Manuscripts Library of the Ohio State University Libraries, Columbus, OH.

Putzi, Jennifer. ""Some Queer Freak of Taste": Gender, Authorship, and the "Rock Me to Sleep" Controversy." *American Literature* 84 (2012): 769-95. Duke UP. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.

Sorby, Angela. "A Visit from St. Nicholas: The Poetics of Peer Culture, 1872-1900." *American Studies* 39.1 (1998): 59-74. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Feb. 2013.

Stedman, E.C. Rev. of *Poems in Company with Children*, by Sarah M.B. Piatt. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine.* March 1878: 628. Print. The Sarah M.B. Piatt Collection of The Rare Books and Manuscripts Library of The Ohio State University Libraries, Columbus, OH.

Sterling, Richard. *Sterling's Little Southern Orator*. Macon, GA: J.W. Burke and Co., 1872. The Jerry Tarver Elocution, Rhetoric, and Oratory Collection, The Rare Books and Manuscripts Library of The Ohio State University Libraries, Columbus, OH.

*Tommy's First Speaker for Little Boys and Girls.* Chicago: Donohue Brothers, 1885. The Jerry Tarver Elocution, Rhetoric, and Oratory Collection. The Rare Books and Manuscripts Library of The Ohio State University Libraries, Columbus, OH.

Webster, Michael. "Poetic Modes: Symbolism, Imagism, Modernism." *Poetic Modes: Symbolism, Imagism, Modernism*. Grand Valley State University, n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.

# Appendix

Reprint: “Two Visions of Fairy-land,” by Sarah M. B. Piatt

One, with her blue, faint eyes, could dream too much;

One, rosily sun-stained, wanted things to touch.

She met him on the stair with half a blush:

“How late you sleep!” he said. She whispered, “Hush!”

“I read that painted book last night, and so

I dreamed about Prince Charming—” “Did you, though?

“Why, I was wide awake in time to see

All Fairy-land! I wish you’d been with me.”

“What was it like?” “Oh, it was green and still,

With rocks and wild red roses and a hill,

“And some shy birds that sung far up the air,—

And such a river, all in mist, was there!”

“Where was it?” “Why, the moon went down on one

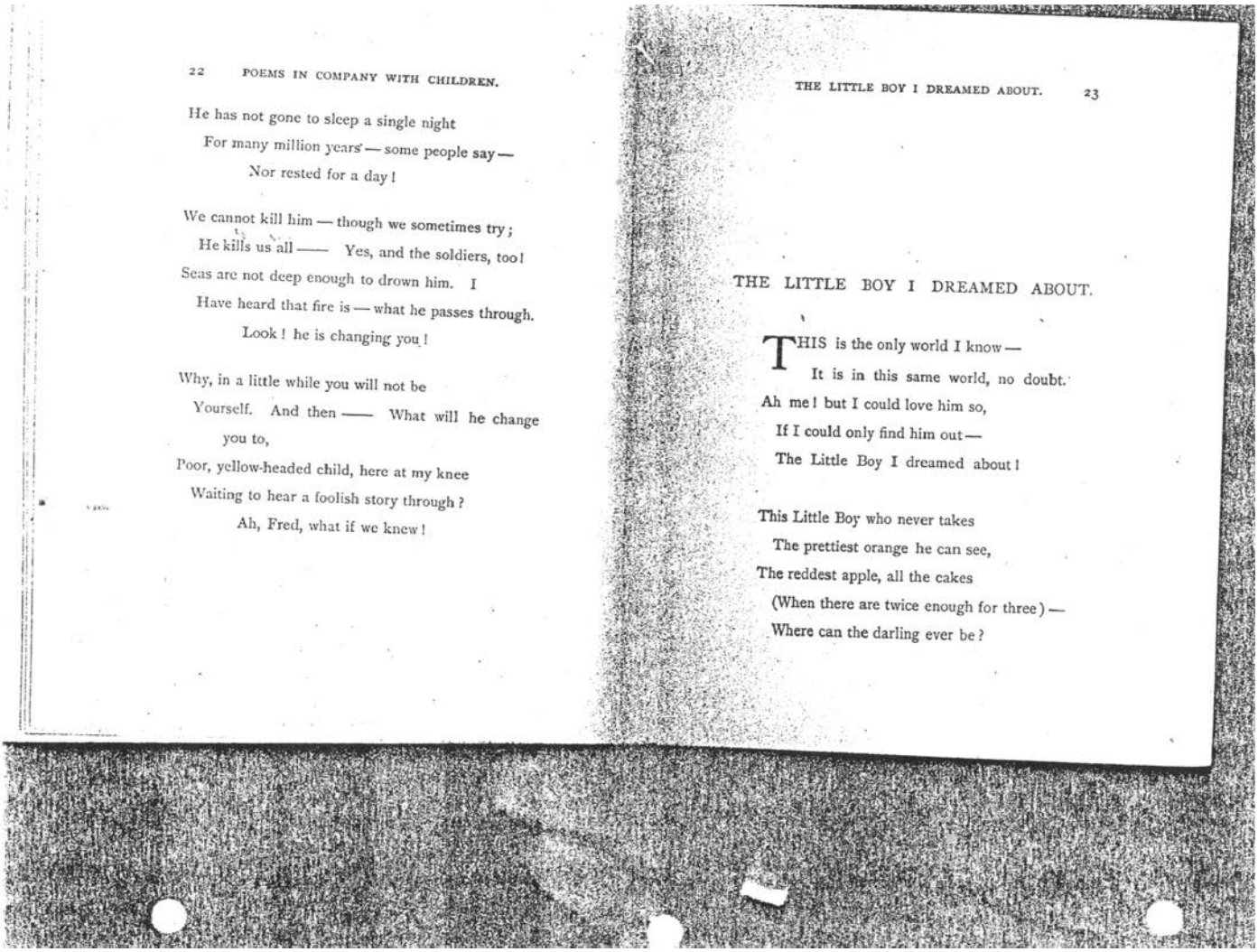
Side, and upon the other rose the sun!”

“How does one get there?” “Oh, the path lies through,

The dawn, you little sleeper, and the dew.”

Text from *St. Nicholas* via *Palace Burner*.

Illustration 1a: “The Little Boy I Dreamed About” reprinted from *Poems in Company with Children.*



22 POEMS IN COMPANY WITH CHILDREN.

He has not gone to sleep a single night
For many million years — some people say —
Nor rested for a day!

We cannot kill him — though we sometimes try;
He kills us all —— Yes, and the soldiers, too!
Seas are not deep enough to drown him. I
Have heard that fire is — what he passes through.
Look! he is changing you!

Why, in a little while you will not be
Yourself. And then —— What will he change you to,
Poor, yellow-headed child, here at my knee
Waiting to hear a foolish story through?
Ah, Fred, what if we knew!

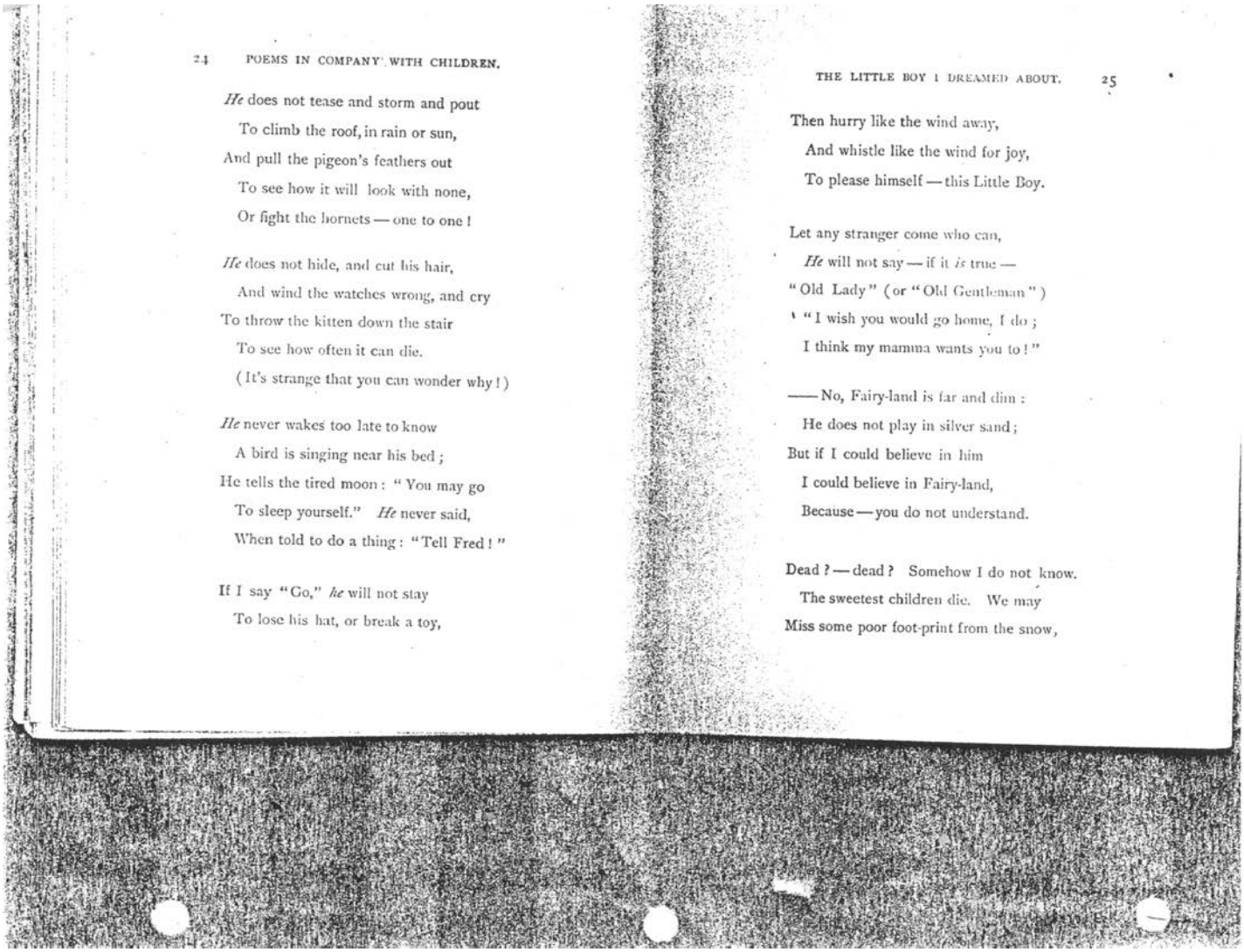
THE LITTLE BOY I DREAMED ABOUT. 23

## THE LITTLE BOY I DREAMED ABOUT.

THIS is the only world I know —
It is in this same world, no doubt.
Ah me! but I could love him so,
If I could only find him out —
The Little Boy I dreamed about!

This Little Boy who never takes
The prettiest orange he can see,
The reddest apple, all the cakes
(When there are twice enough for three) —
Where can the darling ever be?

Illustration 1b: “The Little Boy I Dreamed About” continued.





*He* does not tease and storm and pout
To climb the roof, in rain or sun,
And pull the pigeon's feathers out
To see how it will look with none,
Or fight the hornets — one to one!

*He* does not hide, and cut his hair,
And wind the watches wrong, and cry
To throw the kitten down the stair
To see how often it can die.
(It's strange that you can wonder why!)

*He* never wakes too late to know
A bird is singing near his bed;
He tells the tired moon: "You may go
To sleep yourself." *He* never said,
When told to do a thing: "Tell Fred!"

If I say "Go," *he* will not stay
To lose his hat, or break a toy,



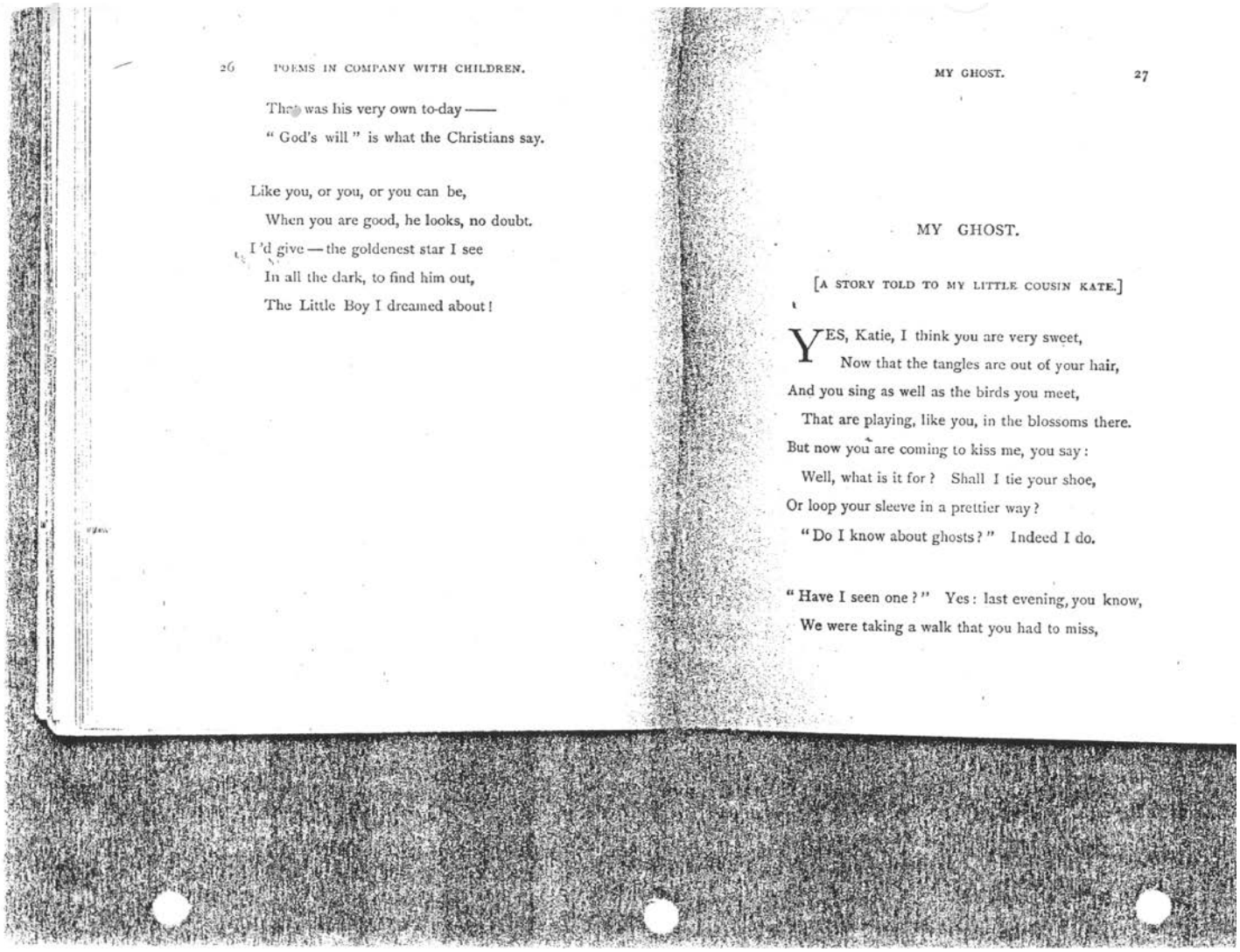
Then hurry like the wind away,
And whistle like the wind for joy,
To please himself — this Little Boy.

Let any stranger come who can,
*He* will not say — if it *is* true —
"Old Lady" (or "Old Gentleman")
"I wish you would go home, I do;
I think my mamma wants you to!"

—— No, Fairy-land is far and dim:
He does not play in silver sand;
But if I could believe in him
I could believe in Fairy-land,
Because — you do not understand.

Dead? — dead? Somehow I do not know.
The sweetest children die. We may
Miss some poor foot-print from the snow,

Illustration 1c: “The Little Boy I Dreamed About” continued.





That was his very own to-day ——
“ God's will ” is what the Christians say.

Like you, or you, or you can be,
When you are good, he looks, no doubt.
I 'd give — the goldenest star I see
In all the dark, to find him out,
The Little Boy I dreamed about!



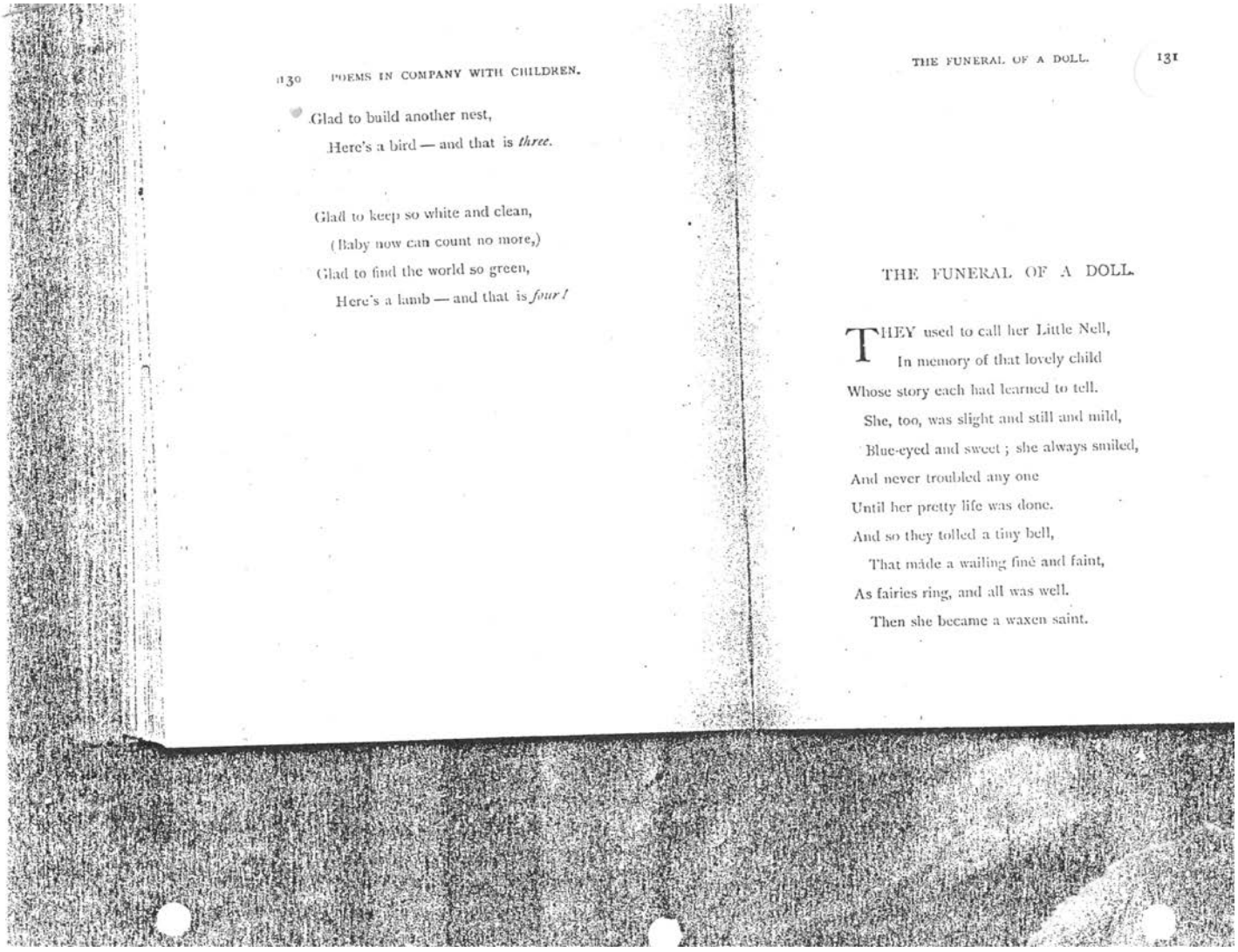
## MY GHOST.

[A STORY TOLD TO MY LITTLE COUSIN KATE.]

YES, Katie, I think you are very sweet,
Now that the tangles are out of your hair,
And you sing as well as the birds you meet,
That are playing, like you, in the blossoms there.
But now you are coming to kiss me, you say:
Well, what is it for? Shall I tie your shoe,
Or loop your sleeve in a prettier way?
“Do I know about ghosts?” Indeed I do.

“Have I seen one?” Yes: last evening, you know,
We were taking a walk that you had to miss,

Illustration 2a: “The Funeral of a Doll” reprinted from *Poems in Company with Children*.



130 POEMS IN COMPANY WITH CHILDREN.

Glad to build another nest,
Here's a bird — and that is *three*.

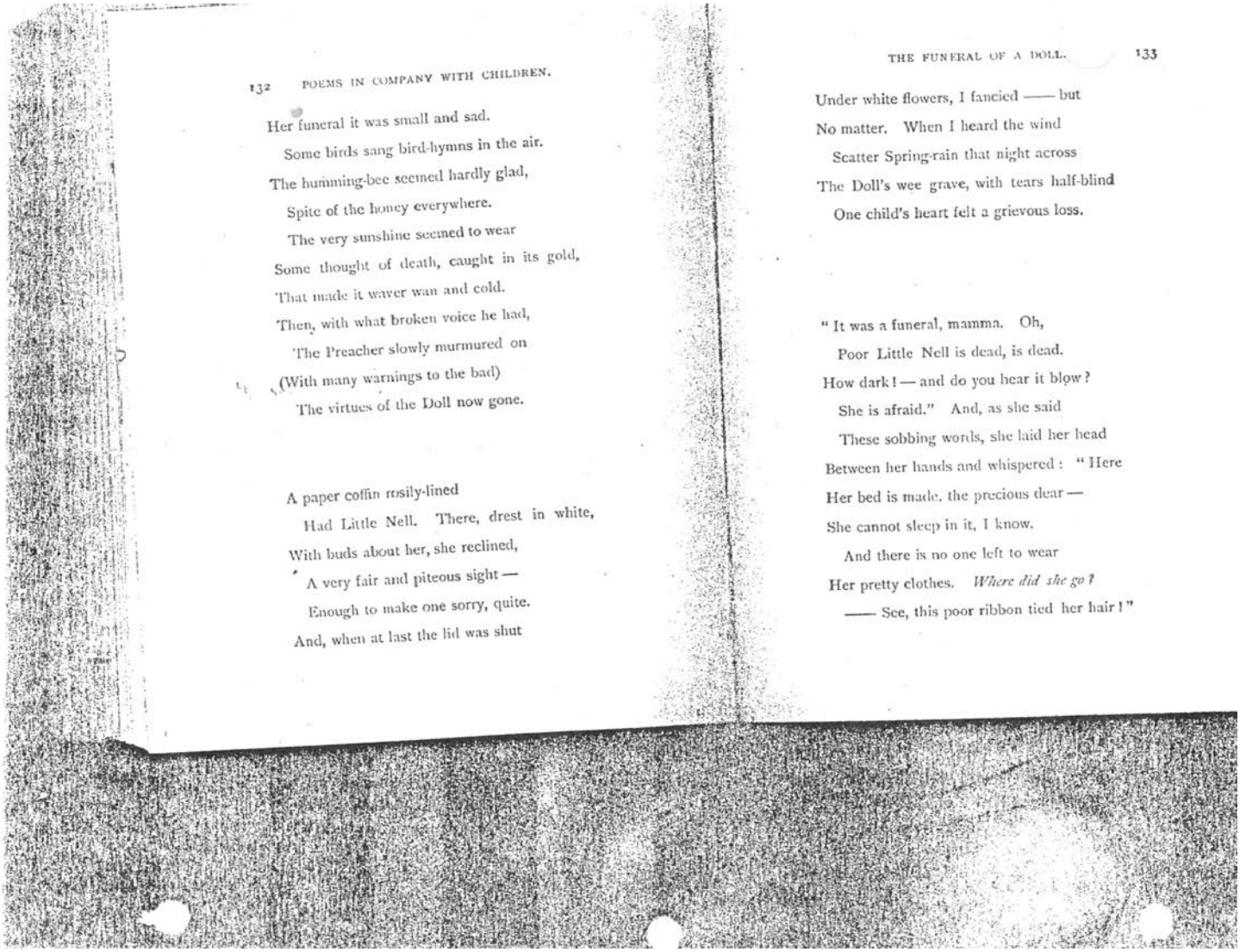
Glad to keep so white and clean,
(Baby now can count no more,)
Glad to find the world so green,
Here's a lamb — and that is *four!*

THE FUNERAL OF A DOLL. 131

## THE FUNERAL OF A DOLL.

THEY used to call her Little Nell,
In memory of that lovely child
Whose story each had learned to tell.
She, too, was slight and still and mild,
Blue-eyed and sweet; she always smiled,
And never troubled any one
Until her pretty life was done.
And so they tolled a tiny bell,
That made a wailing fine and faint,
As fairies ring, and all was well.
Then she became a waxen saint.

Illustration 2b: “The Funeral of a Doll” continued.



132 POEMS IN COMPANY WITH CHILDREN.

Her funeral it was small and sad.
Some birds sang bird-hymns in the air.
The humming-bee seemed hardly glad,
Spite of the honey everywhere.
The very sunshine seemed to wear
Some thought of death, caught in its gold,
That made it waver wan and cold.
Then, with what broken voice he had,
The Preacher slowly murmured on
(With many warnings to the bad)
The virtues of the Doll now gone.

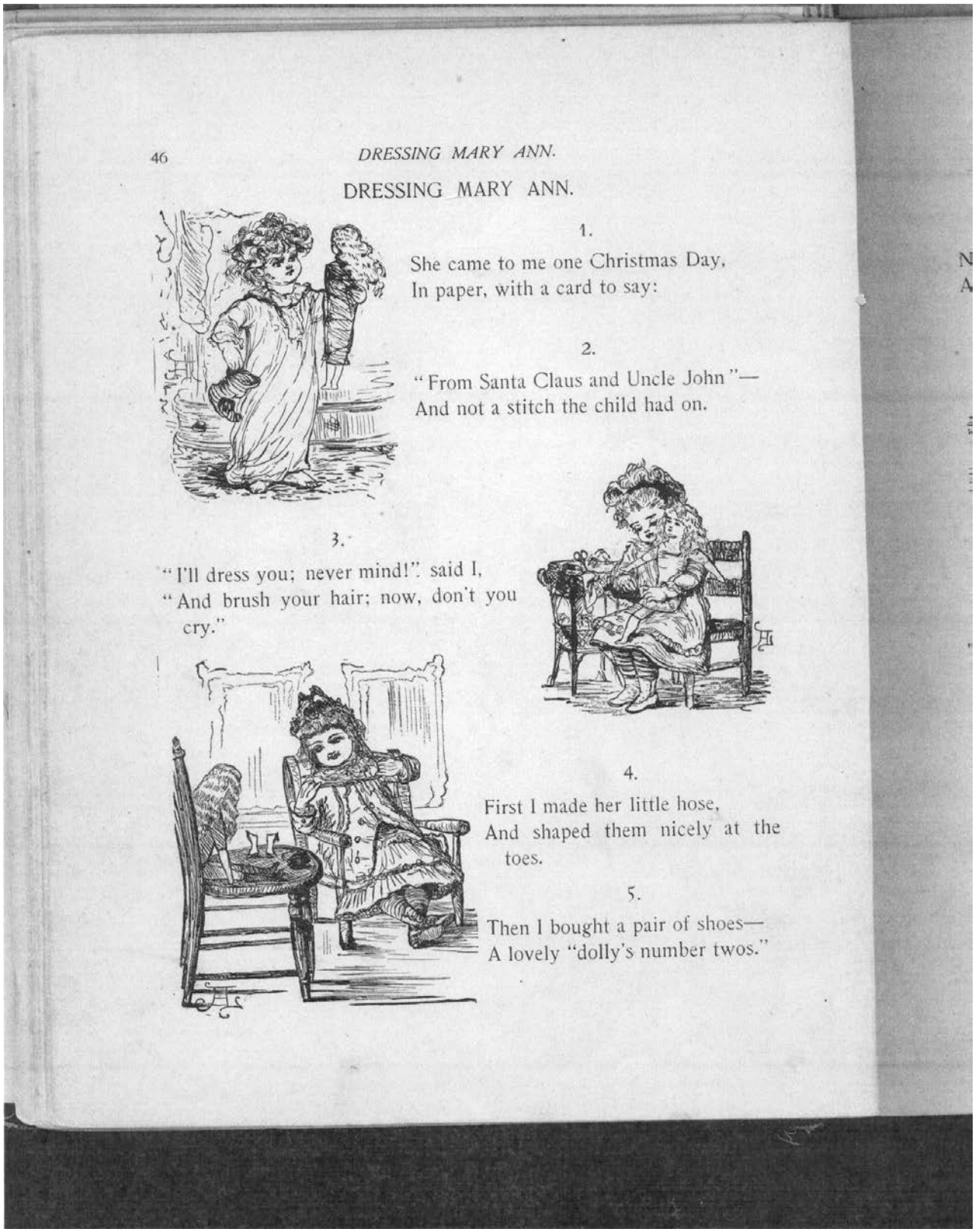
A paper coffin rosily-lined
Had Little Nell. There, drest in white,
With buds about her, she reclined,
A very fair and piteous sight —
Enough to make one sorry, quite.
And, when at last the lid was shut

THE FUNERAL OF A DOLL. 133

Under white flowers, I fancied —— but
No matter. When I heard the wind
Scatter Spring-rain that night across
The Doll's wee grave, with tears half-blind
One child's heart felt a grievous loss.

"It was a funeral, mamma. Oh,
Poor Little Nell is dead, is dead.
How dark! — and do you hear it blow?
She is afraid." And, as she said
These sobbing words, she laid her head
Between her hands and whispered: "Here
Her bed is made, the precious dear —
She cannot sleep in it, I know.
And there is no one left to wear
Her pretty clothes. *Where did she go?*
—— See, this poor ribbon tied her hair!"

Illustration 3a: “Dressing Mary Ann” reprinted from *The Kindergarten, or Home and School Culture.*



46 *DRESSING MARY ANN.*

DRESSING MARY ANN.

1.

She came to me one Christmas Day,
In paper, with a card to say:

2.

“From Santa Claus and Uncle John”—
And not a stitch the child had on.

3.

“I’ll dress you; never mind!” said I,
“And brush your hair; now, don’t you cry.”

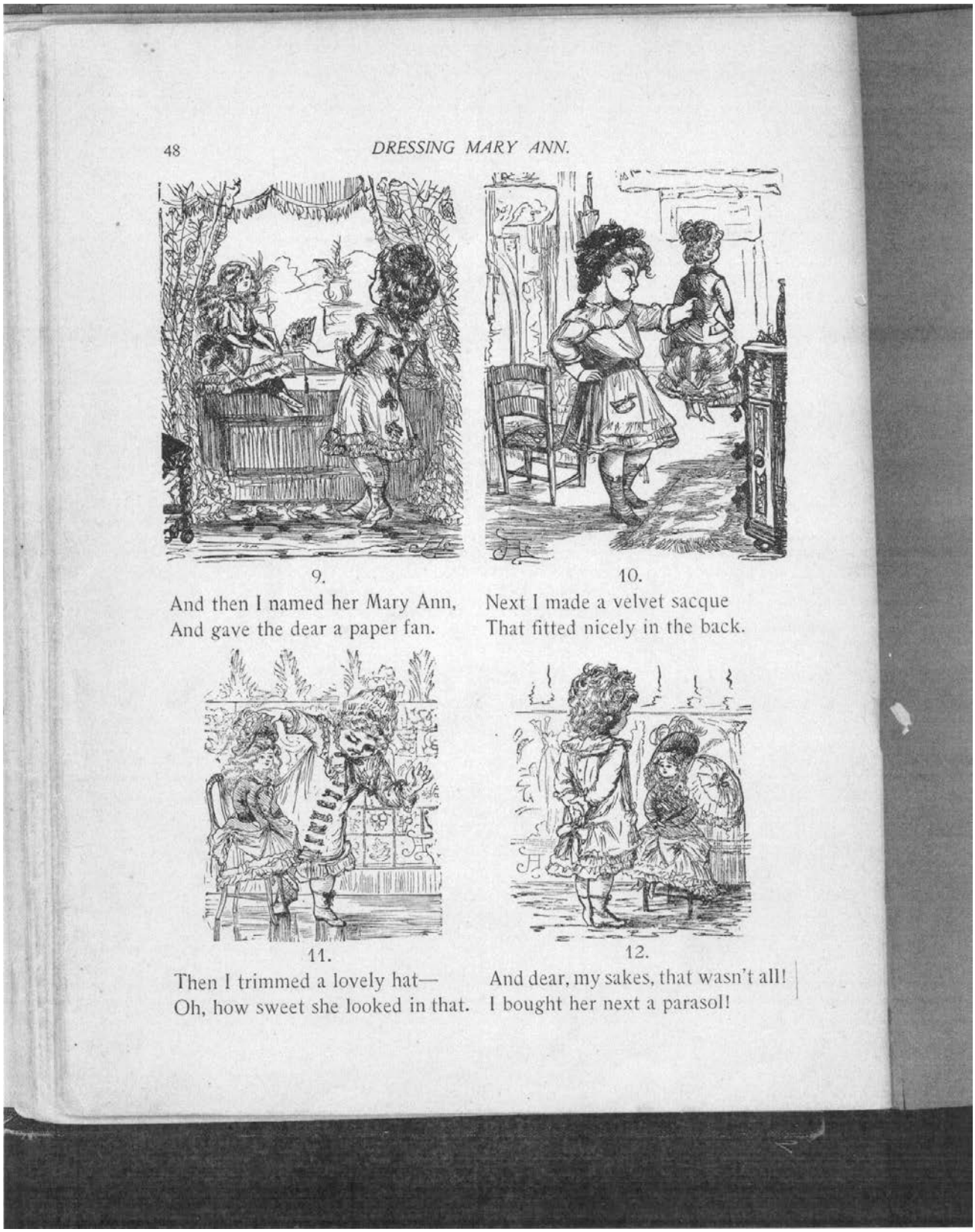
4.

First I made her little hose,
And shaped them nicely at the toes.

5.

Then I bought a pair of shoes—
A lovely “dolly’s number twos.”

Illustration 3b: “Dressing Mary Ann” continued.



48 DRESSING MARY ANN.



9.

And then I named her Mary Ann,
And gave the dear a paper fan.



10.

Next I made a velvet sacque
That fitted nicely in the back.



11.

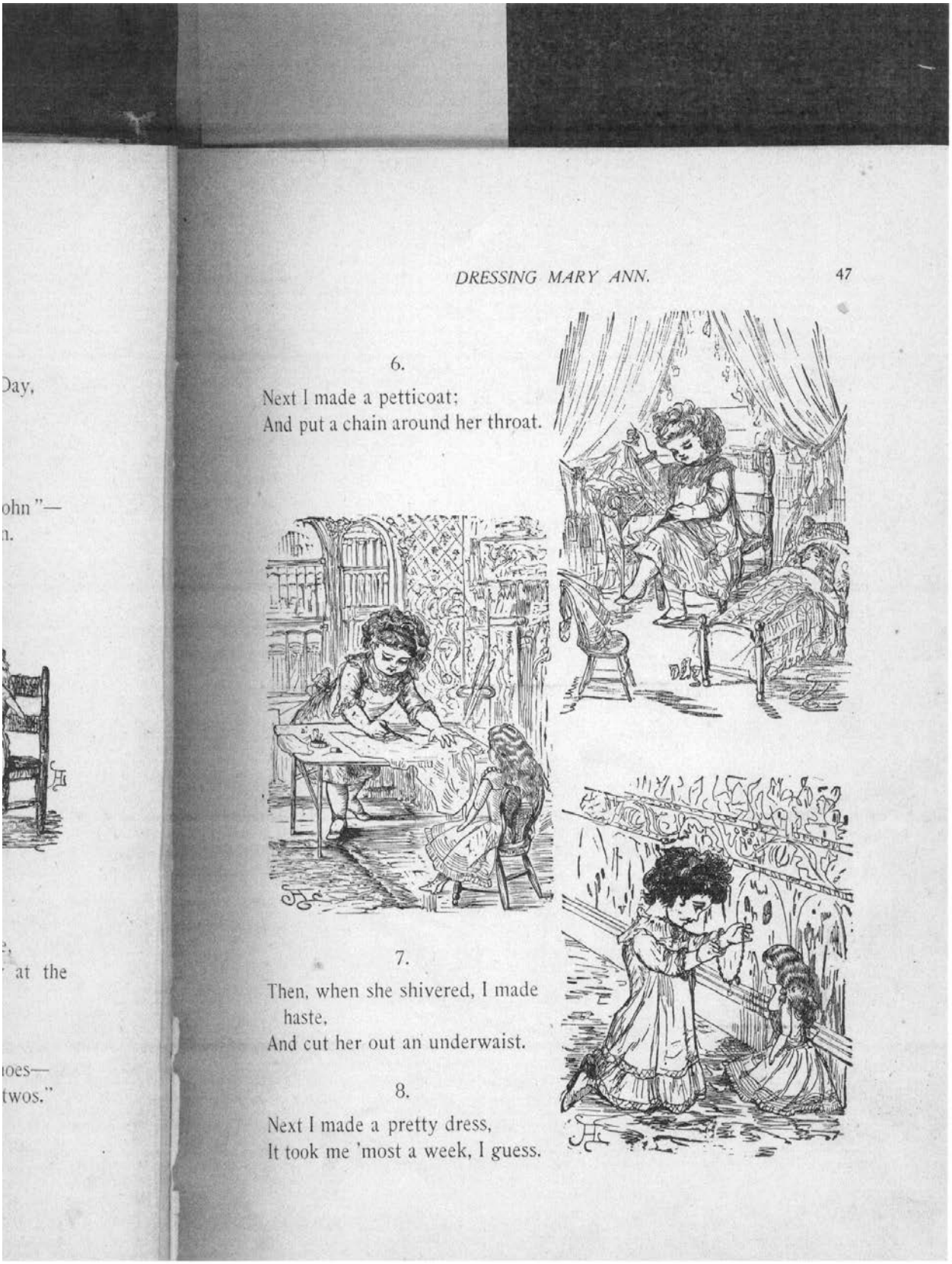
Then I trimmed a lovely hat—
Oh, how sweet she looked in that.



12.

And dear, my sakes, that wasn't all!
I bought her next a parasol!

Illustration 3c: “Dressing Mary Ann” continued.



DRESSING MARY ANN. 47

6.

Next I made a petticoat;
And put a chain around her throat.

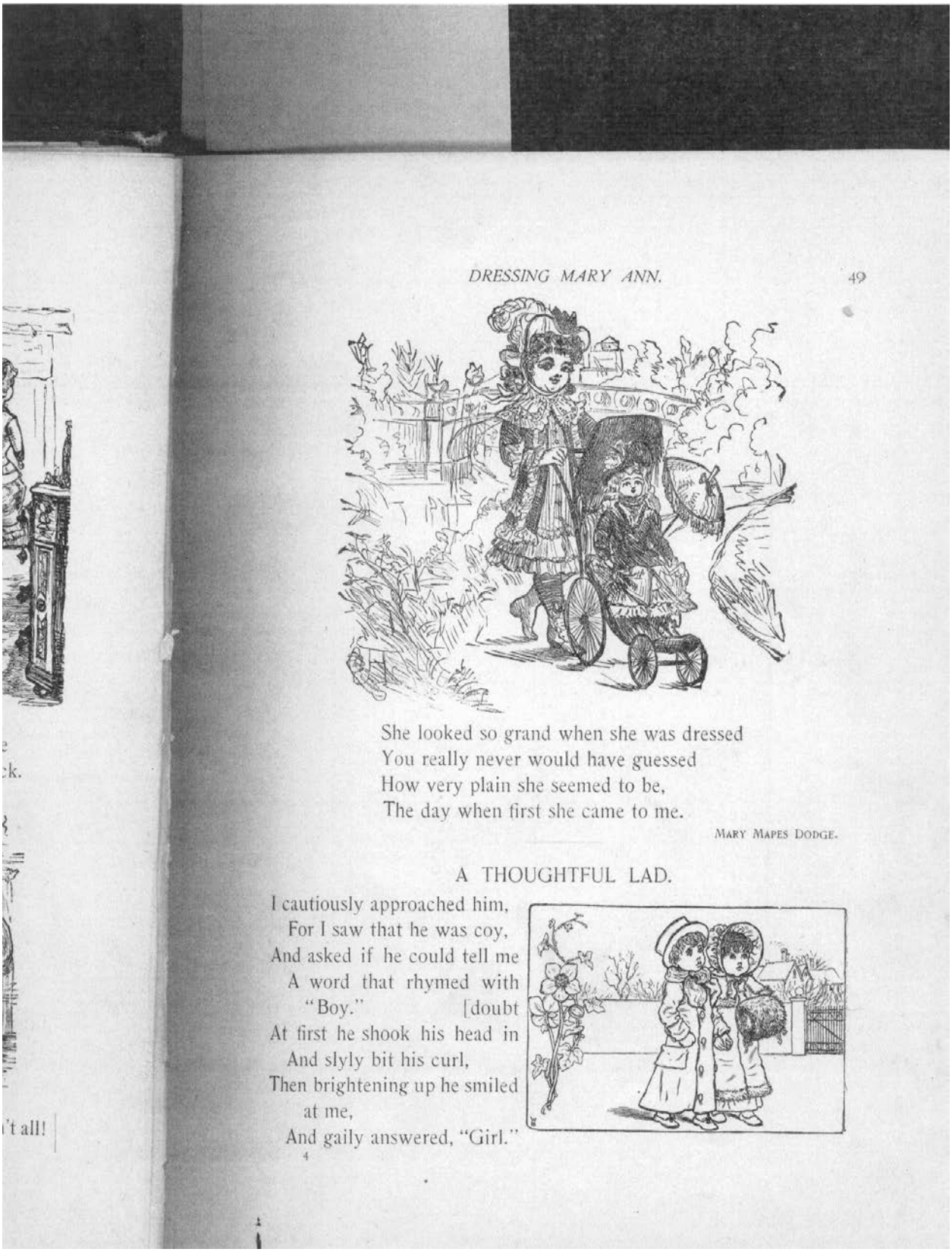
7.

Then, when she shivered, I made haste,
And cut her out an underwaist.

8.

Next I made a pretty dress,
It took me 'most a week, I guess.

Illustration 3d: “Dressing Mary Ann” continued.



DRESSING MARY ANN. 49

She looked so grand when she was dressed
You really never would have guessed
How very plain she seemed to be,
The day when first she came to me.

MARY MAPES DODGE.

A THOUGHTFUL LAD.

I cautiously approached him,
For I saw that he was coy,
And asked if he could tell me
A word that rhymed with
"Boy." [doubt
At first he shook his head in
And slyly bit his curl,
Then brightening up he smiled
at me,
And gaily answered, "Girl."